



Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, February 17, 2022
Testimony submitted by Julieth Callejas, Interim Executive Director, End Hunger Connecticut!

Raised Bill. No. 5033 AN ACT ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF FOOD-INSECURE STUDENTS AT PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION.

My name is Julieth Callejas, and I am the Interim Executive Director at End Hunger Connecticut! (EHC!), a state-wide anti-hunger nonprofit that assists residents with critical federal food assistance resources, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). EHC! submits this testimony in support of Raised Bill No. 5033: An Act Addressing the Needs of Food-Insecure Students at Public Institutions of Higher Education.

In primary and secondary school, there are multiple federal food assistance programs available to help prevent childhood hunger such as the School Breakfast (SBP) and National School Lunch Programs (NSLP), as well as the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). On average, between FY 2017-2021, over 227,000 Connecticut children relied on school lunch. Despite a clear need, thousands of young adults lose access to these programs once they graduate high school and pursue higher education. Rising costs for tuition, housing, and meal plans create additional obstacles, forcing many young adults to choose between buying textbooks and food. Connecticut's college students know this struggle. A study released in February 2020 by the University of Connecticut, noted 38% of students across all five of its campuses reported high levels of food insecurity.

This documented need for food assistance amongst our college students jeopardizes the futures of young people in Connecticut. A study released in 2021 by researchers at the John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, "...found a strong inverse association between household food insecurity and educational attainment. Students from food-insecure households were 43 percent less likely to graduate from college, including with an associate's degree; 43 percent less likely to attain a bachelor's degree; and 61 percent less likely to attain a graduate or professional degree, compared to non-food-insecure students." EHC! believes the proposed bill will help CT's colleges and universities continue to prioritize all students' basic needs as an essential part of the learning process, thus allowing them to thrive at school and use their skills to strengthen their communities after graduation.

We support the plans outlined in this bill, which not only assess students' nutritional needs at our state universities, but also create a course of action to address shortcomings and enhance existing strategies. EHC! applauds the proposed adjustments to the SNAP student work requirement which will enable more students in need to receive benefits without adding to their already strained schedules and responsibilities. According to The Hope Center's 2020 national college survey, one in five college students is parenting a child while enrolled in classes. Our college students are working parents, adults pursuing higher education for the first time or returning to complete a degree. Many are young adults juggling multiple jobs alongside their schoolwork trying to make ends meet. A typical college student is no longer solely attending school full-time and receiving financial support from their families. We ask leaders to adjust current regulations to reflect the reality of modern students' lives.

EHC! envisions a future where no college student is food-insecure because they have a variety of resources available to help them succeed such as SNAP assistance, on campus food pantries, and low-cost dining options. By passing this bill, leaders can help students navigate their college years successfully, unburdened by the stress of wondering where their next meal will come from. Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony and for your commitment to addressing hunger in Connecticut.

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